

# Franklin County tax vote needs thoughtful response

By the Tri-City Herald editorial staff

Nobody is happy about paying more taxes.

But sometimes they're necessary for things like the safety of the community.

So we're urging voters -- and ourselves -- to take the time to consider carefully Franklin County's ballot measure for construction of a new jail.

If voters approve the measure Nov. 8, it would create a 0.3 percent criminal justice sales tax for 30 years. That means shoppers would pay 30 cents more on a \$100 purchase made in Franklin County.

That may not seem like too tough of an increase in the overall scheme of things, but consumers and business are looking for any edge they can find these days.

On the other hand, the current jail is aging and over-crowded. Without some relief, the courts will eventually order a remedy.

Rapid growth in Pasco has created a need not only for more jail space but also for administrative and court services.

Voters rejected a similar proposal in 2009. And conditions at the jail haven't gotten any better.

On the upside, the recession has helped lower construction costs. The most recent estimate has the jail expansion about \$5 million less than it was in 2009.

The jail upgrade and addition proposed with this tax has evolved from the plan proposed two years ago, creating additional cost savings through a new design as well.

The jail would be a two-tiered building with cellblocks arranged around a central hub. Kitchen and laundry facilities would be expanded. Work release inmates would be moved out of portable units and back to the jail building itself. The booking area would expand to have 24 beds in holding cells, and jail administration would move into the new area.

A two-story building in front of the expanded jail could be the home of Pasco Municipal Court if the city becomes a partner in the project. The sheriff's office and affiliated departments would be on the second floor.

The estimate for the project is \$17.3 million. It's a lot of money, but Franklin County commissioners did the right thing by approving the ballot measure. They are well aware that the existing jail is headed for a crisis.

If approved, the county would get 60 percent of the new sales tax. Commissioners were assured by architects that the county's portion of a 0.2 percent sales tax would cover the costs of building the expanded jail. The other 40 percent would be divided among Mesa, Connell, Kahlotus and Pasco, based on population.

The county would keep its portion of the remaining 0.1 percent tax to pay for the increased operational costs of a larger jail.

Pasco's City Council plans to discuss the sales tax measure Monday. The city says it needs new municipal court space and a larger police station. Its lease for court space in the county's public safety building is up in May and an extension has not been agreed on.

We know it's a tough time to think about spending any more money. But our community has been blessed to remain relatively unscathed by the recession.

The population growth in Pasco alone is a testament to the strength of the financial foundation. But growth has its costs and public services increase in tandem with population. And, unfortunately, so does crime and the subsequent need for punishment.

Tax increases are difficult decisions for voters. All we ask is that they weigh the matter carefully, with an eye toward the future health of the community.

Read more: <http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2011/07/31/1589265/franklin-county-tax-vote-needs.html#ixzz1TucLNh3E>